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Dr. George Barger has been appointed to the chair of chemistry in connection with medicine at Edinburgh University. Dr. Barger is at present research chemist to the Medical Research Committee, National Health Insurance.

At the University of Cambridge Mr. Joseph Barcoft, F.R.S., of King's College, has been appointed reader in physiology; Mr. A. V. Hill, F.R.S., of King's College, university lecturer in physiology, and Dr. Hartridge, of Kings College, university lecturer in the physiology of the senses.

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

PATENT REFORM PROSPECTS

A *Report of the Patent Committee* of the National Research Council, recommending *inter alia,* (1) the separation of the Patent Office from the Department of the Interior, (2) the creation of a single Court of Patent Appeals, to be located in Washington, and (3) certain salary readjustments, is being printed in the March issue of the *Journal of the Patent Office Society*—of which additional contents are as follows: "The Patent Office from 1828 to 1836" (a historical article), by W. J. Wyman; "A United States Patent Commission" (preferring a commission to a commissioner), by John Boyle; "A Proposed Reorganization of the Examining Corps" (advocating the grouping of related divisions into "departments," to be supervised by the respective members of a strengthened board), by Bert Russell; "Art Classification of Patents for Patent Office Use" (favoring reliance on analogies of structure and function), by G. A. Lovett.

It is understood that the matters referred to in the above-mentioned report are but initial measures and that the Patent Committee has been continued, to press for necessary legislation.

At a meeting of the Patent Office Society on February 17, the following resolution was taken with reference to the proposed separation: That the Patent Office Society approve, and support by all proper means, both as an organization and as individuals, that National Research Council bill which provides for the establishment of the Patent Office as a separate institution, independent of the Interior Department and of every other existing department of the government. The discussion of the foregoing resolution included no single word of disesteem toward Secretary Lane, under whose jurisdiction the office now is.

Dr. Geo. E. Hale, chairman of the Council, in an address to the Patent Office Society on March 3, 1919, stated the present personnel of the council's enlarged Advisory Committee on Industrial Research, including many well-known leaders in the industrial world. Dr. Hale deprecated the impracticable distinction between "pure" and "applied" science, and emphasized again, even in connection with industrial advance, the importance of what he preferred to call the fundamental sciences.

Because Dr. Hale had also stressed the importance of those cross connections for which the Research Council aims to provide, associating the various groups of specialists now at work in diversified and somewhat isolated fields, and because of the prospect of a continued activity on the part of the Patent Committee as above referred to, this latest announcement was construed by Dr. Hale's hearers as justifying the hope of some very real and general cooperative effort toward the establishment of a patent system that shall in fact do its proper part—nationally and perhaps internationally—"to promote the progress of science and the useful arts."

Bert Russell

A STANDARD SCIENTIFIC ALPHABET

To the Editor of Science: May I call the attention of Mr. J. C. Ruppenthal whose letter on, "A Standard Scientific Alphabet" appeared in Science for February 21, 1919, pp. 191–192, to the International Phonetic Association.

Its secretary, just before the war, was Paul Passy, its address, 20 rue de la Madeleine, Bourg La-Reine, Seine, France; its organ, *Le Maître Phonétique.* It had about 1,800 members and it has adopted an International alphabet which can be used for all languages and is widely employed by phoneticians. The work of Mr. A. G. Bell and the late Mr. H. Sweet should also be referred to in this connection.

Of perhaps greater importance than a standard alphabet is the question of an international language. In this connection the "Academia pro Interlingua" has carried on a scientific study of the question and perhaps the majority of its members are in favor of adopting simplified Latin. Professor G. Peano, of the Turin (Italy) University, is president of the Academia which has been in existence over twenty-five years.

A. FANTI

BUREAU OF STANDARDS

DR. MOODIE'S OPISTHOTONUS

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Professor Moodie's Study No. 3, Paleopathology, "*Opisthotonus* and Allied Phenomena among Fossil Vertebrates,"[1] aims to show that the bent back head which one sees not commonly in well preserved vertebrates is "a manifestation of spastic distress" of the creature, "suggesting a strong neurotoxic condition," and leading the author even to seek for the infecting bacteria which have given the shortly-to-be-fossilized vertebrate a cramp in the neck. This condition Dr. Moodie compares with opisthotonus in man as illustrated in Bell's painful drawing.

I wonder, nevertheless, whether it is necessary to seek so far afield for the cause of this head-bent-back position in fossils. This position, every one will admit, is an extremely common one, in fact most backboned animals show it when they are well preserved—while opisthotonus is, so far as I know, an extremely rare malady. It would trouble one to find recorded cases of it in reptiles or birds, amphibia or fishes: even in mammals collectively the percentage of deaths following opisthotonus would evidently be microscopically small. Then, too, when one of these rare cases died in cramp would it be apt long to retain that position while it floated down a stream with muscles rotting, or while it dried out of its soddenness on a bank of mud, or while deliquescently putrid it became picked more or less to pieces by all manner of sarcophagous creatures? No it seems to me that what the doctor calls "opisthotonus" is merely a physical phenomenon which causes the neck region of a macerating vertebral column to bend backward. For on the back of the column are stouter ligaments which hold the bones together: hence when the backbone eventually loosens up in the process of decomposition the bodies of the vertebræ separate earlier than the arches, thus producing the inbent column. Of course there would be no great degree of bending back in the chest region, for here the cage of ribs would long keep the back straight: nor in the lumbar region, since here the neural arches are short and there is therefore less leverage for their dorsal ligaments: nor again in the tail, for here the ligaments are far more nearly balanced in all sides of the column.

BASHFORD DEAN

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

FIELD WORK IN ARIZONA

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: At the last faculty meeting of the University of Arizona, President R. B. von Kleinsmid outlined a plan for summer-session work that was received with enthusiasm by the faculty, and may be of interest to many readers of SCIENCE. Since the climate of Tucson is not suited to the conventional campus summer-session, the university plans to carry on vacation-work in the field, in several parts of the state where the climate is more bracing or where the work would be of such a character as to make the mid-summer heat a negligible consideration. It is proposed that groups of students under the direction and leadership of professors from the University of Arizona, study: archeology through actual excavation work in the northern part of the state, geology at the Grand Canyon, biology at the Mt. Lemon camp, mining engineering at the great copper mines, etc. Such opportunities for first-hand observation and investigation in an interesting and comparatively fresh field will doubtless appeal

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[1] *Am. Naturalist,* LII., pp. 369–394.